**State of California**

**Health and Human Services Agency**

**Department of Rehabilitation (DOR)**

## Blind Advisory Committee (BAC) Meeting

## Thursday, February 8, 2024

9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Hybrid meeting held in DOR Central Office, 721 Capitol Mall, Room 301

Sacramento, CA 95814, with virtual participation available via Zoom. Public locations listed on agenda.

**Meeting Minutes**

**In attendance**:

BAC members (in-person): Sarah Harris, Chris Fendrick, Guillermo Robles, Sandy Balani, Julie Parrish

BAC members (by Zoom): Cheryl Thurston, Joe Smith, Margaret Buchmann-Garcia, Cricket Bidleman

DOR staff (in-person): Victor Duron, Sue Pelbath, Michael Thomas, Peter Dawson, Laura Rassmussen, Jay Harris, Melissa Harris, Jennifer Wilbon

DOR staff (by Zoom): Eric Mazariegos, Kelly Snow, Luis Rodriguez, Marc Leyva, Carmen Ramirez, Yukiko Long, Kate Bjerke

Members of the public (in-person): Max Duarte

Members of the public (by Zoom): Leslie, Gibbons, Margie Donovan, Mitch Pomerantz, Stella Woodall, Silvana Rainey, Eduardo Juarez

## Item 1: Welcome and Introductions

The Chair, welcomed attendees, conducted a roll call, introduced BAC committee members, and established a quorum.

**Item 2: Introductions of DOR staff and public**

The Chair introduced department staff and members of the public.

## Item 3: Approval of the BAC Meeting Minutes and Review of Action Items

## Motion: Chris Fendrick moved a motion to approve the BAC meeting minutes from the November 9, 2023, BAC meeting. The motion was seconded by Guillermo Robles.

**Vote**: Sandy, yes. Cricket, abstain. Margaret, yes. Guillermo, yes. Sarah, yes.

Cheryl, yes. Joe, yes. Julie, yes. The motion passed.

**Item 4: BAC Committee Members Network Updates**

BAC members reported on matters of interest in their networks and

communities. Some highlights included the following:

Committee members comments and questions

* CVPC elections recently took place
* Discussed what is going on in the BEP program
* New BAC member was introduced
* Hoping to speed up procurements and tuition reimbursement
* CCB celebrated their 90th anniversary
* Various members discussed what was going on in their programs, past conferences attended, and/or important events that took place and will be taking place this year
* COVE keeps growing and currently has a wait list

Public members comments and questions

* Discussed national updates that affect BEP vendors and the BEP program

**Item 5: Office of Civil Rights Report**

Agenda item canceled.

Department comments and questions

* There have been no reports or claims

**Item 6: Update on Service Standards Taskforce**

Committee members comments and questions

* Will be working on this task force soon
* Questions regarding how Bagley-Keene affects taskforce meetings

Department comments and questions

* Reviewed Bagley-Keene rules for meetings

**Item 7: BEP training overview**

The BAC received an overview of the BEP training

Department comments and questions

* Provided an overview of what makes a good vendor
* If a consumer is interested in the BEP program, they must go through an assessment process and training program
* There are currently 4 to 5 new consumers interested in the program
* The new training program is offered online and in-person, start dates for training can begin right away
* Would like to make sure consumers have work experience
* The curriculum will give vendors the knowledge to help them be prepared and successful
* The training is a two-week assessment to see where consumers need more skills
* Randolph Sheppard Act follows strict regulations and policies, which allows only food service and vending

Committee members comments and questions

* Make sure consumers know good customer service and have a good attitude
* Would like to know what type of HR skills consumers are learning in training
* Is California looking into other areas other than just food vending
* California is only food vending, but BEP is looking for other opportunities
* Would like to know why the BEP program is taking long to expand
* Is OCB the only program doing assessments for consumers

Public members comments and questions

* The training curriculum has been revised
* Consumers are getting the tools they need
* Other states have started looking into other opportunities such as gyms and hotels; hoping California can explore other opportunities as well

**Item 8: Report on managers January training**

Laura Rassmussen district administrator, DOR BFS district

Department comment and questions

* Under SB-105, training is mandatory for managers specific to Blind Field Services
* Provided self-employment update
* Went over the training agenda
* Discussed onboarding and training for new QRP’s
* Discussed what training is involved to make sure new staff is completely trained
* Managers shared ways to motivate staff
* Talked about qualifications for deaf blind specialists
* Talked about how to deal with personnel issues
* Discussed integrated computer systems
* Discussed the rebranding of BFS and making it more employment focused

Committee members comments and questions

* Talked about the rebranding of BFS
* OIB is under the Specialized Services Division

Public members comments and questions

* Talked about work site evaluations and manager training
* Talked about BFS services and the rebranding of BFS

**Item 9: BFS Success Stories**

Krishna Jariwala was invited to share his story and experiences. Krishna is an accessibility auditor for the VA

Committee members comments and questions

* Inquired as to what specific services Krishna has received
* Asked how training was with the VA
* Asked Krishna if he had advice for others

Department comments and questions

* Would like to know what equipment Krishna currently uses at his current job
* Asked Krishna’s counselor, Bonnie Jimenez, what made him successful

Public members comments and questions

* Congratulated Krishna

**Item 10: Directorate Report**

Victor Duron, DOR Chief Deputy Director

Federal level updates

* Dante Allen now the RSA Commissioner
* Expecting large sums of reallotment dollars this year
* Have been able to avoid a federal budget impasse for several months

State level updates

* Legislature has been phasing out subminimum wage
* Discussed the state budget for 2024-2025
* Budget, there is a 37.8-billion-dollar shortfall
* Discussed the use of set-aside dollars, and reductions in programs, including revenues and delays
* Departments are going to be asked to address their vacant positions and the funding will be reduced from the departments budgets
* A master plan is being put together for developmental disabilities
* Discussed reform for the aging system
* Discussed rate reform for foster care youth
* Continue to work on the behavioral health reform
* There is a master plan on career education
* It is teenager and youth adult mental health awareness month
* Hybrid workplace across the state, two days of site-based work begins in March
* The consumer is put first and operational needs will be based on consumer needs

Department level updates

* The budget remains strong
* DOR trying to fill vacancies
* Discussed the voice options program
* Discussed expenditure freeze
* Discussed the departments accomplishments in 2023
* The next generation of leadership changes are taking place within the organization
* DOR subject to the new hybrid work environment/site-based work
* How do we include businesses as recipients of DOR services
* Discussed new projects
* Discussed “lived experience”

Committee members comments and questions

* Questions about budget allocation
* Discussed services for individuals, “equal is not equitable”

Public members comments and questions

* What is DOR’s plan to work with counselors to strengthen the relationship with HR departments and employers and what’s the plan for retention of employees
* Discussion of self-employment and communication barriers

## Item 11: DOR Specialized Services Division (SSD) Report

* OCB will have a self-defense group doing a training
* Student success stories were shared
* OCB starting to see more BEP candidates
* BEP program discussed, staff vacancies discussed
* Talk about the BEP educational conference
* OIB updates, including OIB budget and expenditures, and ages served
* Next Thursday there will be a meeting for grantees (managers only to attend)
* Talked about vacancies and BFS staff
* SB 105 contract getting finished
* Discussed student services
* Discussed positions and new hires for various programs
* Discussed BFS report. Continuing student outreach, looking at getting parents involved
* Updates given about the BEP program
* Counselors can deviate from an OCB recommendation

Committee members comments and questions

* Asked if counselors are invited to the meeting with the grantees

Public members comments and questions

* Question regarding the self-defense training at OCB
* Asked if a counselor can deviate from an OCB recommendation
* Questions about Marine Corp locations for BEP
* Would like the referral process explained

**Item 12: Outcomes of Success**

Laura Rasmussen gave a report on successful outcomes of consumers in both residential and day program settings. Laura read a statement from a consumer to her counselor that shared her experiences and connections she made with others.

Committee member comments and questions

* Shared the importance of having close connections and peer support
* Staff are people who have come through the system and who are now training others

Public members comments and questions

* Shared experiences, commented on the consumer’s letter, and discussed how connecting with others is important

**Item 13: Grievance**

Discussed the grievance policy, DOR 1000, how it applies to BFS, and what

options consumers have if there is a disagreement

Committee members comments and questions

* If an OIB consumer is under the age of 54, can they be eligible to go to this grievance process

Department comments and questions

* An OIB consumer cannot go through this process, they have to go through the program they are receiving services from

Public members comments and question

* Explained what challenges people encounter and provided examples
* Wished there was a check in process for consumers/a way to help them understand more about the process
* If there is an equipment problem, contact your counselor so it can be case noted

**Item 14: Identify future agenda items**

* Invite the office of civil rights to present at the May BAC meeting
* OIB presentation
* Discuss self-employment options other than BEP
* Speaker from Deaf and Hard of Hearing Committee (DHHAC) to present
* Would like TPP (Transition Partnership Program) presentation at August meeting

**Adjournment (3:59 p.m.)**